The Coast-to-Coast Decade

From the earliest days, some Americans dreamed that one day the United States would stretch across North America from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. In the 1840s, that dream finally came true—starting with “Oregon Country.” This northwest section of the continent was a beautiful and valuable resource, covered by forests and laced with waterways and coastlines. There was money to be made in fishing and shipping, harvesting timber and fur animals, and mining for gold. It was no surprise that the United States wasn’t the only country with a claim to the land.

War With Great Britain... Again??

Yep, it was another dispute with America’s former mother country. Back then, Great Britain controlled the territory we know today as Canada. Oregon Country stretched from the border between modern-day Oregon and California all the way up into British territory. Both Britain and America wanted this land, and they’d been arguing over it for a while. But the 1840s was a time when Americans got a passion for expanding. James Polk shared that passion—and he won the 1844 presidential election promising to add Oregon to the United States. He let the British believe America would go to war to control all of Oregon Country.

What a Clever Guy

President Polk was bluffing. By that time, the U.S. and Britain had already agreed that America’s northern border would run along the 49th parallel. (That’s where it is today.) The only section left undecided was the part that ran through Oregon Country. Polk wanted all he could get, but he knew he couldn’t get it all. What he really hoped for was to extend the 49th parallel border all the way to the Pacific Ocean. He pitched this idea to Great Britain, and they took it. With the small matter of working around some very valuable islands in the Pacific waters, the border was set. The United States now stretched from coast to coast.

An Unsettling Pattern

By the time the deal was made in 1846, American settlers were flooding Oregon Country. They risked their lives traveling by wagon train on a long and dangerous route called the Oregon Trail. But Oregon Country was already home to many Native American tribes such as the Salish, Klamath, and Nez Perce. The U.S. tried to convince each tribe to sign a treaty agreeing to move onto small, restricted areas of land. Some tribes signed treaties only to have settlers take over the very land that was reserved for the Native Americans. The more settlers arrived, the more the conflict grew. Tribes joined together to fight for their land, but ultimately, they lost. Native American tribes were forced to sign treaties and move onto small reservations to make way for settlers. The change made it difficult or impossible to continue the traditional ways of life.
A. “Fifty-Four Forty or Fight!” James Polk used this as a campaign slogan when he ran for president. Follow the directions and answer the question to figure out what it meant!

1. On the globe, lines of latitude are measured in degrees. Find the mark for the 54° line. Label it 54°.
2. The north border of Oregon Country was at 54° 40’ (the ‘ symbol means minutes). There are 60 minutes between each line of latitude, so 54° 40’ would be pretty close to the 55° line. Put a mark where you think 54° 40’ would be.
3. Draw a line across the map at 54° 40’. Make sure your line is curved like the 55° line. (Hint: It should be exactly along the north border of Oregon Country.)
4. Label your line 54° 40’.
5. Re-read the second paragraph of the reading. Explain what you think “Fifty-Four Forty or Fight!” meant:

B. Compromise.

1. Which line of latitude did the U.S. and Great Britain finally agree would be the border?
   - the ______° line
2. Find the mark for that line of latitude. Label it.
3. Oops — that line of latitude runs right through the bottom of a large island off the coast of Oregon Country! Find that island. Label it Vancouver Island.
4. Draw the border between the U.S. and British territory in Oregon Country! (Do not draw anything across Vancouver Island.)
5. Shade all of the British territory with lines like this:

C. The Oregon Trail. Use the diary entries to help you draw the Oregon Trail on the map.

Entry #1
We are on the trail, heading north-west from Independence to Fort Kearny. I hope we arrive soon!

Entry #2
We left Fort Kearny. It is so beautiful traveling along the river, plus we always have water! Next stop: Fort Laramie.

Entry #3
We’re headed into the Rocky Mountains, but we are still following the river. We will cross the Rockies at South Pass. The mountains look steep and scary!

Entry #4
We made it through the pass! Can’t wait until we get to Fort Hall.

Entry #5
I’m so glad we’re traveling along a river again. We’ll be able to follow the Snake River all the way to Fort Boise.

Entry #6
We followed the Snake away from Ft. Boise, but now the river is going northeast and we have to go northwest! We will travel away from the river and go up to Whitman Mission.

Entry #7
Almost there! We’ll follow the Columbia River to The Dalles, and then to Fort Vancouver! Then we’ll look for a place to settle down and live.
Oregon Treaty (1846)

A. “Fifty-Four Forty or Fight”! James Polk used this as a campaign slogan when he ran for president. Follow the directions and answer the question to figure out what it meant!

1. On the globe, lines of latitude are measured in degrees. Find the mark for the 54° line. Label it 54°.

2. The north border of Oregon Country was at 54° 40′ (the ′ symbol means minutes). There are 60 minutes between each line of latitude, so 54° 40′ would be pretty close to the 55° line. Put a mark where you think 54° 40′ would be.

3. Draw a line across the map at 54° 40′. Make sure your line is curved like the 55° line. (Hint: It should be exactly along the north border of Oregon Country.)

4. Label your line 54° 40′.

5. Re-read the second paragraph of the reading. Explain what you think “Fifty-Four Forty or Fight!” meant:

   It meant the U.S. would get all of Oregon Country up to the 54° line or the U.S. would go to war against Great Britain.

B. Compromise.

1. Which line of latitude did the U.S. and Great Britain finally agree would be the border? the 49° line

2. Find the mark for that line of latitude. Label it.

3. Oops — that line of latitude runs right through the bottom of a large island off the coast of Oregon Country! Find that island. Label it Vancouver Island.

4. It was agreed that Great Britain would get Vancouver Island. Shade the island with lines like this:

5. Draw the border between the U.S. and British territory in Oregon Country! (Do not draw anything across Vancouver Island.)

   Shade all of the British territory with lines like this:

C. The Oregon Trail. Use the diary entries to help you draw the Oregon Trail on the map.

---

Entry #1
We are on the trail, heading north-west from Independence to Fort Kearny. I hope we arrive soon!

Entry #2
We left Fort Kearny. It is so beautiful traveling along the river, plus we always have water! Next stop: Fort Laramie.

Entry #3
We’re headed into the Rocky Mountains, but we are still following the river. We will cross the Rockies at South Pass. The mountains look steep and scary!

Entry #4
We made it through the pass! Can’t wait until we get to Fort Hall.

Entry #5
I’m so glad we’re traveling along a river again. We’ll be able to follow the Snake River all the way to Fort Boise.

Entry #6
We followed the Snake away from Ft. Boise, but now the river is going northeast and we have to go northwest! We will travel away from the river and go up to Whitman Mission.

Entry #7
Almost there! We’ll follow the Columbia River to The Dalles, and then to Fort Vancouver! Then we’ll look for a place to settle down and live.